

Effective Classroom Practices in Art Education

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	3
Chapter 2: Big Ideas: Rejecting Restriction in Artmaking.....	9
Chapter 3: Service Learning: Creating, Changing, Inspiring.....	26
Chapter 4: Conclusion.....	42
References:	46

Chapter 1

Introduction

About Me

I was born in the rural Northeast Georgia town of Blairsville, nestled in the lower end of the Appalachian Mountains. I grew up only 5 miles from Georgia's tallest mountain, Brasstown Bald. Blairsville receives most of its income from tourism. With wildlife, waterfalls, Sorghum Festival in the fall, Scottish Highlands Festival in the summer, and scenic views, people from all over enjoy what Blairsville has to offer. In school we did not have the chance to take art very often, but we did have art on a cart every other year. Art was an option in 8th grade through high school. It was there in high school that I really developed a love for art. I found a place where I was most comfortable and felt I excelled at everything. In college I started as an early childhood education major, but I felt very out of place. I wanted to teach, but I didn't like the people I was around or the subject matter that well. I found that I really missed art, and decided to visit the art department; I almost instantly fell in love with it. Everyone in the art department was friendly and I loved looking at all of the different projects displayed in the hallway galleries. I thought, "Why don't I just teach what I love?" It was at that moment, I decided to become an art teacher.

I graduated in 2007 from North Georgia College and State University with a Bachelor of Science in Art Education. I had my first and only interview for a teaching position on the very morning of graduation. I took the job which was only part time and later became a full time position just before the school year started. I am now about to begin my 5th year teaching art at Riverbend Elementary in Gainesville, Georgia.

I was very excited about going to The Ohio State University for my graduate degree. When I was a kid would always tell my mom on the way through Columbus to see family, “I want to go to college at Ohio State”, then she would make up a reason why I could not go. She was more accepting of my request when I was older, but we could never have paid the out of state tuition.

I am the youngest of three children as well as being an “Oops!” baby. My brother and sister are 18 and 19 years older than me, so I grew up with their children. I have four nephews, two nieces, and two grand nephews. I am the first person in my family to receive a Bachelors degree, and now a Masters degree. Growing up in the North Georgia Mountains was fun, but not the best place to make a living. We grew crops, mostly peppers, to sell and to eat. My mom canned most of our food and we rarely ate any meat because of the extra expense. My mom worked in a sewing factory and my dad worked at a boot factory. I usually spent the mornings with my dad and the evenings with my mom. I never knew we were poor when I was child, even though I can remember now that my mom used food stamps to get groceries for several years. My mom made most of my clothes by hand and she always taught me that I had to work for what I wanted. In middle school, when items become necessary for your social existence, I worked in my sister’s fields picking beans, mowing lawns, and picking blueberries for money. In high school I played the trombone in the concert, jazz, and marching bands. I was also active in the 4-H club for 8 years.

I like to kayak, hike, paint, take photographs, and make pottery in my spare time. I have a small studio at my parent’s house in my grandfather’s old Sorghum syrup shed. My dad, husband, and brother helped convert the old shed by enclosing the space with boards that my dad saw milled himself, and still has many of the old Locus tree posts original to the structure. Due to

my busy schedule I have not had as much time as I would like to spend creating artwork in my studio. In many of my artworks I use a dragonfly in my signature. I use the dragonfly to represent "me" is that every time I am near water I seem to attract dragonflies. They like to sit on the end of my kayak or land straight on me, while no one else in my party is bothered with them. I think sometimes it must be like my "spirit creature".

My dad grew up in Blairsville, GA with his 10 brothers and sisters. He only went to school through the 8th grade because he had to stop working to help out on the farm when his mother died. He served in the United States Army as a Military Policeman with the 4th Armored Division while stationed in Germany. He took hundreds of photographs while he was there and I think I get my love of photography from him. My mother grew up in Sullivan, Ohio with her 6 brothers. My mom grew up on a farm as well. Her side of the family has an unusual last name of Cowhick, which we pride ourselves on. My mother always entered me in art contests and enrolled me in art classes which is what I believe cultivated my interest in art.

My School

My school is Riverbend Elementary in Gainesville, Georgia. Most of the school building is 79 years old, except the "specials" wing, which is about 10-15 years old. The rest of the school has undergone remodeling. My classroom is located in the basement, underneath the gym. We affectionately call it the "dungeon" because we are separated from the rest of the school with a long breezeway. We rarely have contact with the rest of the school, but that at least keeps us out of the trouble some of the other teachers like to cause. My classroom does not have any windows, but at least I have 3 closets, 3 sinks, and a kiln. The upside to not having any windows is that my classroom is the safest one to be in during tornado season, as it also partially

underground! I teach around 350 students each week. Sometimes I see one set of students 2-3 times a week with our schedule. We now also teach what we call a “charter” class in the morning on a separate rotation from our normal schedule which rotates classes every nine weeks. In these classes we are to teach students how to use technology in our subject areas, but we received no training on how to implement this, so we were thrown into it to fend for ourselves. When these classes were started, our school was looking to become a charter school with a technology and communication emphasis. The charter application was turned down by the state, but was given a new direction by our superintendent. He offered to charter our school and after long negotiations, in the 2011-2012 school year we will become the Accelerated Scholars Academy. The Academy will start out as one class per grade level, leaving every other homeroom to operate as it has in the past until more people apply each year. The advanced classes will be more technology and communications driven and require more project based assessment. I will not have to do much to my regular classes since the advanced students will not be grouped by skill level in my subject area. I actually look for a flip-flop since many of my average to low students seem to perform better in the arts.

One of my requirements as a teacher in Georgia, other than posting standards in a million different places and marking the ones we are working on for each grade level, is keeping a notebook of all lesson plans (turned to the exact page) in case the principal or a reviewing committee happens to come in. I also have to have a day by day planning calendar listing essential questions, standards covered in the lesson, as well as being up to date, sitting out, and turned to the correct page, so that if a sub or anyone were to come in they could just look at the book and know what I was doing and for what day.

My Students

My students are mostly lower to middle class White and Hispanic. We have very few African American and Asian students. My students are very loving, but also very excitable. We do have some Hispanic gang activity in our school and in the trailer parks where most of our students live. I occasionally see students drawing gang related symbols as early as Kindergarten. On the last day of school this year we had a group of students graffiti inappropriate language onto the board that holds the Pre-K class's book bag hooks. Most of my students learn and exhibit behaviors picked up from their siblings, neighbors, and/or parents who are participating in a gang. Over 50% of the students receive free or reduced lunches. Students usually struggle with their school work because of their parents disinterest in their success. So we have to work extra hard to teach our students basic responsibility, respect, study skills, and act as motivators on a daily basis.

My Most Successful Lesson

I have found that making art and writing about it seems to really get my students excited about learning and discussing art. The questions they raise are deeper and more personal. I have seen many students researching topics we have studied for fun in the library. They can't wait to tell me about it! I think getting my students on track with Big Ideas will enhance their love of art even more. One of the most successful lessons I have taught was about Faith Ringgold's work, *Tar Beach*. I taught this lesson to my second graders. First, we read Faith Ringgold's book *Tar Beach*. Then we talked about the artwork and the theme in the book about "place". We talked about what it would be like to fly anywhere we wanted to go. Many children came up with very whacky places to go, such as candy land, and many named places where their families lived. I

asked students to draw the place where they wanted to fly to. Then they would make a paper doll that looked like them. When students were finished they would glue their “paper doll self” to the paper to make it look like they were flying over their place. I then talked to students about souvenirs that they might pick up at their place. We then talked about postcards as souvenirs. I asked them to imagine what their postcard would look like and what would they write to their parents about the place. I gave students a postcard template and instructed them to design a postcard to represent the place they flew to in their picture. Then students were to write about it to their parents on the back. The students were eager to share their finished postcards and read them to the class. Little did I know I was already beginning to grasp the big idea concept!

From my classes at Ohio State University I have become an even better teacher. I am now confident and proud of what and how I teach. My students have been learning more and behaving better because of it. Researching and observing my students becoming excellent learners interested in art has been a great motivation for me. I cannot wait to continue on this path to success.

Chapter 2

Big Ideas: Rejecting Restriction in Art Making

Today, it was if I had died and gone to art teacher Heaven! The art room is filled with cheerful smiles, ideas flow like water, students reflect in their journals, and self-initiated critiques abound while delighted third-graders pour over plans for their dream home. Tom giggles excitedly with his friends as he exclaims, “I love this! We can think of anything we want!” Another student devises trap doors for intruders, piranha filled pools, and a planetarium for friends to learn about the solar system. Small groups compare houses and share ideas freely as they adjust and modify their designs. Why are students so *engaged* in their art making you ask? It all started with a “big idea”.

The Setting

Riverbend Elementary School is a Title 1 Distinguished school, located in the foothills of the Northeast Georgia Mountains just on the edge of the city of Gainesville, the largest city in Hall County. Gainesville, situated on Lake Lanier, is considered a suburb of the city of Atlanta, and is otherwise known as the Poultry Capital of the World because of its many chicken processing plants in the area. In the early 1990’s Gainesville became a haven for Mexican immigrants during the housing and manufacturing booms and its population skyrocketed. One of the many things plaguing the livelihood of Gainesville is the appearance of Mexican Cartels and offshoots of larger gangs, leading to gang violence and drug trafficking. Despite the rise in crime, Lake Lanier remains a popular recreational destination during the summer months for fishing, boating, and kayaking.

Art class at Riverbend had always been lackluster, meaningless to students, and always under attack as being a “fluff” class. The follow along type of teaching approach had grown old to both me and my Hall County elementary art colleagues. With little meaning behind each lesson other than meeting Georgia’s Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) standards, as a group we knew it was crucial that we change the face of art education within our school system to help validate our importance. For a while we directed our focus on cross-curricular art activities to connect with other subjects standards. It is in my opinion that art should not be narrowed so much that we as art educators must begin to teach what other subjects should already be teaching. I do believe that connections between art and other subjects are of great importance, but we should not be defined by that, nor should we widen the dumping ground of which we are trying to escape. I had to find meaning in artmaking, for myself and for my students.

After 4 years of teaching art, I sometimes wonder where it all went. Toiling over lesson after lesson, trying to find the right fit for my students and myself, the stack of lessons plans I accumulated over the years left little to the imagination and often echoed the quick and easy lesson plans anyone can find on the internet. There were few lessons I was proud to keep and many were created out of the need to “survive” the extra stressors that go along with being an elementary school art teacher, such as fundraisers that you never see the proceeds from despite the fact that you used your class time, as well as your students time, and materials to accomplish it, PTO programs, holiday card making for their homeroom classes, and decorating last minute Christmas gift bags for high school teachers my students did not know or at that point find relevant to their lives.

I struggled with the fact that my lessons were full of fluff and technique. After encountering many students over the years who would ask, “Why are we doing this?” or “What’s

the point?” while in the middle of critiques which seemed to be a strain on both myself and my students at the time in order to find any real substance to their work to talk about. I would often ask myself why anything I was teaching should matter to my students. I would reflect repeatedly on my lessons, asking myself, “What did they actually learn from this? Did it mean anything to them?” my answer was more often than not, “nothing and no.”

The state of Georgia finally rolled out a new set of visual arts standards called the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) which were more concise and lead to deeper meaning for student artwork if properly implemented. Within the standards were things called “Big Ideas”, which I began researching and found Dr. Sydney Walkers’ research on using “Big Ideas” or what she also calls “enduring ideas” to teach meaning making in art to be truly riveting, so I bought her book *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking*, and one she co-authored with Marilyn G. Stewart, *Rethinking Curriculum in Art*, both in the Davis Publications Art Education in Practice Series, as well as enrolling in the Mostly Online Master’s Program at the Ohio State University where she teaches (Stewart and Walker, p. 25) and it has changed the way that I teach art in many profound ways.

The Students

Riverbend Elementary is one of the smallest elementary schools in the Hall County School System with an enrollment of 355 students. Riverbends’ student demographics are nearly half Mexican American and Caucasian and more than half of our students qualify for free or reduced meals. Most of our students come from lower to lower-middle class families with both parents working away from home. Close to half of our students all live in the same trailer park where gang activity is prevalent. Since student home life is not best, teachers work extra hard to

catch students up to where they should be academically, act as counselors, and provide safe afterschool activities and tutoring services for students to participate in as well as learn responsibility and self confidence.

Using big ideas to drive my newly found curriculum, I began teaching students with a whole new attitude. At first I was nervous, almost as nervous as my first week as an art teacher, as things did not always go as planned and everything seemed foreign to me since I had always been taught technique was “it” and sometimes humanity shone through if you were a true artist at heart and worthy of any fame at all, but very quickly I became comfortable with what I was doing and energized by the passion of my students. Wanting to find out if big ideas really effected student artwork, or if they were just another passing fad in the art education world, I sought to find out as much as I could about what students thought of the new teaching methods, if students were learning what I needed them to know, if they were connecting to their artwork in new ways, or if I should just scrap big ideas altogether.

Selecting a Grade Level

I had previously tried using big ideas with other grade levels, but saw more resistance to change within those groups. I felt it important to work with a group who could adapt to change rather quickly since the research needed to be successful in a short amount of time. I noticed that lessons for older students would take more time to reflect and review upon as well as work with hormonal tensions amongst the groups that often lead them to whine about having to put forth any effort. Adding to that difficulty was the short, thirty minute time frame of which I get to work with the older students. I decided to conduct my research with four classes of third graders, between the ages of 8 and 9, and a focus group of five students from two of the homerooms

collectively over the course of a year. The classes ranged between 15 and 20 students and each met once a week for 45 minute class periods. These students were my first kindergarteners and have been subjected to every teaching method I have ever tried. This group of students is also made up of many different cultural groups who seem to mesh and work well together. I reviewed student work and reflections throughout the process and narrowed down who would best represent the 3rd grade level's experiences as a whole. The five third-graders I chose to represent student experiences and feelings were students that ranged from shy and quiet to talkative and excitable, as well as students of different genders, ethnicity, and learning abilities. I wanted a mixed group of abilities to measure the amount of learning that took place and whether it was effected by different cognitive abilities, gender, and ethnicity. I conducted interviews with these students a little over half way through the lessons. At the time I was not concerned with whether the students did or did not have an interest in art and artmaking, but it may have been more accurate to include students who did not have a pronounced interest in art.

Selecting a Focus Group

Tom is a talkative and excitable little boy who loves art class, and a little bit more than usual this year. He loves to work independently and as a team with other classmates in any order that you throw at him. Tom will spend any free time he gets finishing or adding to past art projects, or spending hours telling you all about them. In talking with his teachers, they have all seen a change in his enthusiasm for group work and hands on assignments. Usually Tom is very set in his ways and typically hard to work with, but he has certainly learned how to listen to the ideas of others in his group without causing conflict.

Isaac is always eager to please and mild mannered. He prefers to work alone, but works as a great group partner or surprises you and becomes a leader! Isaac tends to be very quiet and shy until he becomes comfortable with everyone he is with, and then he becomes a chatter box of ideas, plans, and excitement. He is also one of my best writers and his reflections have improved the overall quality and creativity of his work, as well as boost his excitement for the project.

Lupita is a shy and quiet girl who loves to create new things. She loves to be fashionable and prefers to work with other people who are also calm and collected. Lupita is seen as the sweet girly girl in her class and all of the students love her. Sometimes she will surprise everyone with her thoughtful and perceptive answers when you least expect it. Lupita has proved to be a great team player and role model for others around her.

Josh is very quick witted and able to speak rather formally for a 9 year old. He is known for his sense of humor and humility. He is well liked and although he does not see himself as having a talent for art, he always gives his all on any project we work on. Josh also has a knack for being a team player and is always encouraging others to do their best no matter what goes wrong.

Hannah is your typical third-grade girl, dramatic, obsessed with animal movies, and very opinionated. Hannah spends her time drawing her favorite things, horses and Titanic. She often makes art at home in her free time and brings it to show and discuss during art class. If anyone wants to talk about their artwork, it is definitely Hannah! Hannah loves to research what we have been talking about in class and share what she has learned with the class during discussion periods.

Big Ideas Come to Life

My third-graders began examining the big idea of “home” while learning about the work of artist Grant Wood. First, students examined their hometown in relation to Grant Wood’s hometown through a large group discussion and the animated video, *Dropping in on Grant Wood*. In a writing activity, students wrote a letter to try to persuade Grant Wood to visit their hometown and explained why he might find inspiration in their hometown for one of his artworks. On another day, we talked about what student’s homes were like, what their favorite room was in their home, as well as their favorite memory in that home. This discussion provide plenty of hilarity as students recounted the adventures of students and their siblings battling it out in the living room with couch cushions, funny things uncles did at birthday parties in the kitchen, and what dad likes to read in the bathroom!

In the next lesson, students learned about artist Pepon Osorio, a Puerto Rican-American artist that focuses his works on the big ideas of “home” and “place”. We discussed the different ways Osorio talked about and created his ideas about home and the memories he had there. Students drew a room in their home that had the most memory for them. When we finished we talked again about the different memories and rooms each person had chosen to represent in their room. Hannah liked that “you get to use your own info and what you learned.”

The next week, a lively discussion ensued about what things would make a home perfect in their eyes. Many stated that they felt their homes were perfect the way they were, and preferred to draw their home as it was with few modifications while other students let their imaginations run wild. Since using big ideas was new to my students, I expected that some students would still shy away from taking risks, but I think that will eventually change over time. When everyone finished, small groups of students were issued cameras and were told to explain their dream house while taking turns filming each other, this was described in conversation by

Leilani as “the best part of the lesson”. In her video, Leilani introduces us all to her house as if we are going on a tour. She gently leads the viewer through the house and eventually to a shark pool where her and her friends hang out from time to time. Each student addressed their house in a different way, making it an exciting adventure into a new place. After the lesson, Josh commented, “Talking about our art is fun. I like using the big idea of home because I feel more focused on my work and I care about it more.” I wanted to show students the finished videos, but I found that we did not have time to get that far since the service learning project deadline was approaching quickly. I know that in the future I would like to expand on those activities and find ways to extend the lesson further.

Observations and Reflections

After finishing these lessons on “home”, I decided to extend the lessons into a service learning project that my fourth and fifth-grade students were working on since their behavior and engagement had been so impressive. Then, the idea of “home” really took off in an unexpected way. I had students watch a video about habitats and discussed what homes exist here at school in our outdoor classroom. My student’s faces lit up all over again, even with using the same big idea as before. My third-graders quickly observed on a short trip to the outdoor classroom that there were simply not enough homes for our resident birds to live in. We even saw the birds themselves and a few of their current homes on our excursion which made it even more exciting and meaningful. The students then worked in small groups to design and build a bird house out of 2 liter soda bottles and other found plastics that I had in my room.

While discussing the bird’s habitat and their needs, a student pointed out that the birds would need food to live happily in our outdoor classroom. It was quickly requested that some

groups create bird feeders as well since it was a part of what home is. Some students volunteered the services of themselves and their father or grandfather to make birdhouses of wood for larger birds that would live in the habitat and donate them to the school for the 3rd graders to decorate. I was amazed at their eagerness to learn and create selflessly as well as the meaning it had created for my students. I once again witnessed the power of the big idea. After I had seen the engagement of my students in this service learning project, I had then wished I had started the service learning project off in this same way for my fourth and fifth graders who seemed disinterested in the project and could barely recall what the project was all about. In their part of the service learning project, fourth and fifth graders showed little interest or connection to the project. Seeing the different attitudes and involvement of both groups of students, the third graders were much more connected and could describe the goals and expected outcomes of the project more thoroughly than the older students.

While reflecting on how art class used to be, my focus group could recall different processes we used in creating our art, but could not remember what it was about. Tom recalled the technique focused drills saying, “We learned how to mix paint and color things good”, while Josh recounted my teaching methods, “We had to follow along and do what you did.” No one in the focus group could recall any of the artist’s names we had learned about, all except the artists who focused on “home”. When I asked how they liked art class before we started using big ideas, Hannah stated blandly, “It was fun...and easier. Now it is harder because you have to focus more.”

I asked the students to tell me about how they learned art now and enthusiastically Tom nearly shouted, “Big ideas let us make things about what we really care about and want to do.” I had seen student engagement increase, which in this day and age is nothing short of a miracle

since students can barely focus on one thing at a time anymore. Despite today's student's lack of focus, partially due to today's booming visual culture and our propensity to stay locked into older methods of teaching. It has been my experience that many students have a hard time imagining things on their own when asked to do so, through this project I have seen their creativity grow and flourish throughout their artmaking process. Isaac surprised me and left me elated when he said, "We can come up with more ideas, they spring off each other." He had clearly seen that working with big ideas improved how he thought about his artwork.

According to Sakatani and Pistolesi, "One of the more compelling reasons to work with big idea themes is the highly motivated and focused response of students to classroom art assignments" (p. 49). When I started out using the big idea of home with my third-graders, I found this statement to be absolutely true. Levine might also say this to be true as she experiences this excitement first hand while implementing a big idea assignment with her eighth-graders, "When I looked up from the books, the other students were so excited to choose books that they were all standing inside the closet" (p.13). My third-graders met me with this same excitement throughout the process of their artmaking. I found that many students were excited, yet still reserved in their thoughts, many asked me repeatedly, "Can I draw it this way? Is it okay if I turn my paper this direction? Does it have to look like my real house? So I can put whatever I want in my dream house...even a pool?" My old oppressive methods came to a head that day in their learned behavior, as the students moved cautiously into their new found artistic freedom. I have always tried to praise and encourage students to use their imagination, but they always seemed to be scared to take chances. My previous curriculum had left students with little wiggle room for personal changes to their artwork since everything looked like it came off of a factory assembly line; everyone's work looked nearly the same. Students then learned that their ideas

had a lot of impact on how they would create their artwork based on what they felt should be in it and that trying new ideas can lead to even better ones!

I have begun to use big ideas so much that I display my big ideas and essential questions on the board in the front of my room. I have one area sectioned off into six parts, one for each grade level and a special fat elephant picture where I write the big idea for the class period. My students always know what the big idea is and will remind me to change it if I have forgotten to do it in between class changes. I list the essential questions on the board to help me stay on track with the lesson and remind students about what things they will be learning. Next time I want to include more contemporary artists and talk more about their processes. Students have had mixed feelings about writing about their artwork, but my third graders have really loved it. I like seeing what is in their minds that they may not express openly during class discussion.

Sometimes I can get students encouraged enough to share their feelings in class by using writing prompts written on the board and customized to the lesson objectives. My 1st graders suggested writing letters to each other during a critique to tell about what they liked about a specific student's artwork. Excited that they came up with this idea on their own, I praised their resourcefulness and agreed to let them write the letters. I asked them to write what they specifically like about the other person's artwork and to ask them a question about how they made certain element of their work or about something they did not understand about the artwork. I urge students to write positively about each other's work because each artist thinks differently and has different reasons for creating things the way they do. They did this very enthusiastically and even made sure that everyone received a letter from someone so that no one would be left out, some even wrote up to three detailed letters to other students! Taylor wrote to Jacob, "I like how you painted your fish different sizes. I like going to the lake too. Why did you

paint the water so dark in your other painting? I like the lighter one because I can see the fish better.” I then discovered just how thoughtful and compassionate my students could be. I have not yet tried using the play exercises given to us by Dr. Walker, because I am still feeling my way through all of this. I think that my students may be more ready to use the play exercises now that they are more comfortable using big ideas.

Conclusion

I often receive many odd looks, as well as enjoyable comments from other teachers since I have been teaching big ideas. My student’s homeroom teachers acknowledge my curriculum more now that I use big ideas than ever before. Teachers now actually talk to me about what the students are learning and even begin discussions with their students while in the hallways about displayed artwork. In the past teachers would make comments such as, “how cute” or “those are pretty” or say nothing at all, now teachers comment on how thoughtful and interesting the artwork is. Sometimes teachers and administrators question why the students write about their artwork and often create stories describing it in their journals. For instance, my administrator commented to me after an observation, “Writing is more academic, than artistic. Why are they writing so much, shouldn’t they be drawing or painting?” Being ready and prepared to explain your teaching methods is all part of being an art teacher, especially when you have went outside the comfort zone of what your administrator’s remember art being like. Even though the students I interviewed collectively told me that they do not like to write, they do enjoy writing about their art and feel that it helped them think about their ideas before they put them into play.

As always, research is a bumpy road to travel down, and even the best art teacher can run into various road blocks along the way. I believe leaving too much freedom in a lesson can leave

students going in several different directions and often running out of gas or just running off the road altogether. To avoid these pitfalls, I leave room for student choices, but create boundaries to keep students on track. It is best to choose no more than five big ideas to teach over the course of the year. Too many can muddle the water and make it harder for students to keep track of what they are working on and thinking about. I prefer to use one worded big ideas, which Walker calls “broad, important issues”, along with a key concept to help define the big idea, such as “Home” and the key concept “Humans and the Environment” (xiii). Some teachers find it easier to use just the key concepts themselves which seems to be more of a personal preference. Sakatani and Pistolesi argue that, “To our minds, single word or short phrase themes such as "Identity," "Culture," or "Society and Art" have become over-used as curriculum themes” (p.49).

Dr. Sydney Walker advises, “The goal is not to mimic an artist’s work or to hold it up as a standard, but rather to emulate the types of thinking processes and personal investment that render professional artmaking as a meaning making endeavor” (p.194). This statement couldn’t have been truer for me since I was taught from the school of thought that everyone should paint like Vincent Van Gogh or capture light like Claude Monet. I enjoyed breaking away from imitating artist’s works with generic, boring copies of their most famous works for nothing more than looks and parent enjoyment. I used to teach students a lot of technique through drills and boring assignments. Now I have many teachers tell me that their students have been really excited to learn about their big idea and have discussed everything they have learned when they return from my class.

How big ideas are incorporated vary greatly from classroom to classroom because of the differences in region, culture, religion, knowledge level of the students, and exposure to the subject matter as well as many other life factors. I have found that I should not become

overwhelmed and question my abilities, no matter how much better someone else's research or lesson plans based on big ideas looks. It is a long learning process and I believe that big ideas will look different to everyone and there is no one right way of implementing them! I think that finding what I was comfortable with and what my students are comfortable with is the key to success in students learning about art and making personal connections through it. The student demographic can also have a lot to do with how a person might implement big ideas based on the needs, interests, or culture of the group being taught. I have found that how I implement big ideas in different grade levels and even within the same grade level tends to vary greatly because of the learning styles of those students.

I began looking at what standards I needed to meet and what artists, both old and modern; I thought were important as well as helped build upon the standards I needed to meet. In Dr. Walker's class ARED 700/Issues in Art, I learned that PBS has a series called Art:21 which showcases the processes, thoughts, and products of various modern artists all based on different big ideas or themes. I had always liked contemporary art, but I had never really understood what it was about and until we started to talk about the artists in class and watched the segments about the artists work. I felt that some of the artists may not be suitable for the elementary crowd, nor some of the language at times, but many are worth learning about even without the video series. I found it important to learn everything I could about the artists I have chose to teach about. Of course that sounds like a no brainer, but getting to know a few artists at a time rather than a hundred ease my stress and kept me focused on the big idea I was teaching instead of being stretched in a million directions as I normally am. We talked about big ideas and how they affect the student's learning through the artmaking process. I now feel more aware of what I am teaching and how it will direct student learning. Goals are more clear and concise,

allowing students a renewed confidence in what they will be learning and giving them more choice without creating chaos due to boredom or disinterest during a lesson. Knowing and seeing the big idea and key concept posted on the board, such as “Homes” and more specifically “your home”; students can focus their work within the umbrella of the idea. Whether the students wanted to think about their home on an individual level, what it means to their family members, or how their home looks and functions, the possibilities for personalization are endless! My students found that they could think about their homes in different ways, without the teacher telling them exactly what to think. Using big ideas put me more as the facilitator to learning rather than the lecturer giving students specific step by step tasks with no self discovery. Students relate the big idea and key concept to their lives while providing meaning, rather than seeing it as just another boring task with little connection to how it relates to their lives.

For me, this research experience has made me more confident in what I am teaching. My students love using big ideas and cannot wait to start their projects. I set out to find out if big ideas worked in the art curriculum and found more than that! I now rarely have any discipline problems due to student’s lack of engagement in what they are learning. Now students want to get out their artwork from past projects and work on it instead of doing a free draw activity or chatting with their friends. Students are more focused, placed in the center of their own learning, and talk to each other in a manner like that of an artist, sharing ideas, asking questions, and giving each other pointers along the way. I have also accepted failure as a reality and a part of learning that must take place in order to be successful. I think this applies to both me and my students. If we never fail, we will never get better because we will simply accept that we are doing our best when we are only average.

While teaching other units based on big ideas, one in particular was based on “Traditions”, a 2nd grade Hispanic girl, brought in a book about Dia de Los Muertos (The Day of the Dead) which is celebrated in Mexico where her family is from. She wanted to read it to the class and have them ask her questions about that tradition. I couldn’t believe how personal their artmaking had become and how it sparked their interests in ways that I have not witnessed before. Students have actually become interested in taking on a facilitative roll with their classmates as well as being the student. Big ideas have helped my students better communicate about themselves and their artmaking experiences. These experiences have led me to try more units based on big ideas with much success in various grade levels. I have discovered along the way that I have to implement big ideas in different ways in order for my students to feel comfortable with this change, and that no class or grade level learns in the same way as their peers, so tweaking lessons is an essential part of using big ideas.

In addition, my colleagues seem to respect what I teach more than ever before and ask more questions about what the students are learning and how I do it. They have even been more willing to participate in extending my lessons. It is great to have other teachers of different subjects asking me how I keep students interested and if I can show them some of the methods that I use. At my school we have a moral booster for teachers where a fellow teacher can commend another for a job well done and I received what we call a “honk” from another teacher who had in the past, barely noticed my existence, who commented on my use of big ideas and how my teaching methods motivate students in and out of my classroom. I am left knowing that within these difficult economic times that if I am laid off from work that I have given my students a solid ground on which to grow and flourish not only artistically, but throughout their

lives in anything that they may do. If I had known how easy using big ideas was, I would have started doing it a long time ago!

Chapter 3

Service Learning: Creating, Changing, Inspiring

“The squirrel is hanging upside down Mrs. Ross!” shouts Libby, a fifth grader, as she passes through the Plexiglas windowed breezeway that separates the outdoor classroom from the steps leading down to the playground area. We were walking back from my room on our way to the gym for an assembly when the excitement broke out. “Do you think the third graders will mind the squirrel eating all of the food out of their bird feeders? I never knew squirrels could hang upside down like monkeys!” she proclaimed. As the Pre-K class passed by us, the shouts and excitement escalated as they began asking their teachers questions about the squirrel. Their teachers obliged appreciatively and provided an on the spot nature lesson. When I began this project with our school I knew the rewards would be great and the students would get to learn a lot from our service learning program, but I never could imagine the amazing lessons that nature would provide my students with so quickly and the appreciation of each other’s contributions that arose.

The Setting

Riverbend Elementary School is a Title 1 Distinguished school, located in the foothills of the Northeast Georgia Mountains just on the edge of the city of Gainesville, the largest city in Hall County. Gainesville, situated on Lake Lanier, is considered a suburb of the city of Atlanta, and is otherwise known as the Poultry Capital of the World because of its many chicken processing plants in the area. In the early 1990’s Gainesville became a haven for Mexican immigrants during the housing and manufacturing booms and its population skyrocketed. One of the many things plaguing the livelihood of Gainesville is the appearance of Mexican Cartels and

offshoots of larger gangs, leading to gang violence and drug trafficking. Despite the rise in crime, Lake Lanier remains a popular recreational destination during the summer months for fishing, boating, and kayaking.

Since I began teaching at Riverbend Elementary I had wanted to involve students in the renovation of a run down, overgrown, outdoor classroom. As the years went by I noticed that teachers rarely took their kids out into this dilapidated space. I went to my principal to see what I could do to get involved, and was told that it was better left to a science teacher. I had given up most of my hopes for the classroom after that, but soon after I took Dr. Hutzel's Multicultural Art Education class. I had to act fast and press hard to obtain privileges over the outdoor classroom. I nearly missed the opportunity to a boy scout who had so conveniently come by the school over the summer break to propose fixing up the outdoor classroom as a community service project. After much negotiation with the principal I was able to ascertain the outdoor classroom as my service learning project.

The Students

Riverbend Elementary is one of the smallest elementary schools in the Hall County School System with an enrollment of 355 students. Riverbends' student demographics are nearly half Mexican American and Caucasian and more than half of our students qualify for free or reduced meals. Most of our students come from lower to lower-middle class families with both parents working away from home. Close to half of our students all live in the same trailer park where gang activity is prevalent. Since student home life is not best, teachers work extra hard to catch students up to where they should be academically, act as counselors, and provide safe

afterschool activities and tutoring services for students to participate in as well as learn responsibility and self confidence.

Selecting a Grade Level

During the beginning of this project I set out to involve only fourth and fifth graders in the renovation of the outdoor classroom, but my negotiations with my principal required me to incorporate the entire school population. I decided to begin with fourth and fifth graders, hoping I would find a way to work the rest of the school in to the project at some point. Things began roughly, but they quickly became routine for myself and my students. When I saw that painting murals with fourth and fifth graders was going to take longer than I had expected, I decided to bring in my third graders. They were working on a big idea unit focused on “home”. I led their personal ideas and exploration of home straight into creating homes for animals at our school.

Selecting a Focus Group

I selected and interviewed six students from Kindergarten, and thirds grades. I also interviewed students in combined grade level groups depending on the group’s project and whether or not they worked together at any point during that project. I decided to focus mainly on the third, fourth and fifth grade’s involvement in the project since fourth and fifth grade worked on their part of the overall project the entire year, while the third graders worked on their part only half of the year. I started out only involving fourth and fifth grade in the project, which in my opinion was much easier to do, but my principal insisted that I involve the entire school on the project. I think that move did make my project suffer overall, but the best was done with what was given to me. Through the interviews it was clear to see that the students in the upper

grades learned more through the project than their counterparts. An overall theme that appeared within the interviews and during individual student reflections was “working with others”.

The students I interviewed in the fourth and fifth grades was made up of three girls and three boys, students who had previous interest in art, students who had or have little interest in art, and consisted of three students of Mexican descent and three students of Caucasian descent. Half of these students were from lower and upper socioeconomic backgrounds as well as ranging from below average to above average learning abilities. These students also ranged from outgoing and popular to shy and overlooked.

Noah, a fifth grader, has a knack for leadership, despite his sometimes arrogant attitude and Justin Bieber-like looks. His popularity when used for good can motivate even the most sluggish students in the class. This past year Noah joined the art club for the first time with the purpose of going on our field trip. I saw this as an opportunity to transform his complacent attitude in art class to a deeper appreciation for art in general. In years past, Noah took very little time on his art projects and instead spent it being a distraction for the class.

Litzy, a fifth grader, moved in just this year to Riverbend, so I have not gotten to know her as well as the other students, but she tends to be a student who is either interested or not interested in a project. She has never been a disruption, even if she does not seem dedicated to a project. Litzy has always been straight forward about how she feels about what she is developing as a project in a respectful manner.

Victor, also a fifth grader, is almost always disinterested in art class, despite that he will spend his time drawing in every other class he attends, even when he is not supposed to be. I got to know Victor on a more personal level through the afterschool YMCA program where I tutored

and taught art classes. Victor is very sweet, loving, and energetic, but he seems to have a chip on his shoulder and the nagging need to maintain a bad boy attitude. Through this project I have seen Victor come out of his rebel cocoon and work diligently alongside his classmates.

Janneth is a fun loving fourth grader who is not ashamed of who she is, nor is she very shy. She is an excellent student in all subject areas and generally makes friends easily. Janneth has a leadership quality that seems to draw other students to her. She often spearheads group projects and delegates group member roles in an organized manner.

Cameron, a fourth grader, is so quiet you often forget he is there! He works hard at everything he does and tends to only talk to certain students in his class. His shyness often hinders his ability to work in groups or participate in class discussion. I felt like he stepped out of his shell a little bit during this project and I was interested in what changes may have been made in his demeanor.

Sloan, also a fourth grader, has a quiet, go with the flow personality. She has always seemed to like art and participates in all art class assignments with little hesitation or complaint. Sloan is that peaceful kind of student who will make friends with anyone and always does her best to help others work out their differences. Her personality could be attributed to her mother being a teacher at our school, yet she does not display the entitlement attitude that seems to plague other children of teachers at our school.

When asked to describe the most meaningful part of our project, the student interview groups all responded that working with and helping others learn was the most meaningful part of the experience to them. Noah said “Being understanding with one another and not goofing off helped us talk with our partners and stay focused on the project.” Litzy followed by saying

“Some people can be rude, but you had to work it out and come to an agreement in order to work together.” When asked about doing a similar project next year, everyone gave a resounding “yes”. The fifth graders expressed sadness about not getting to do it again since they would be at another school. Cameron and Sloan agreed that they would like to see a project that would be on a more global scale next year. Through talking with these students I can see that they are beginning to think more about how their actions can effect a community, locally as well as globally.

The Service Learning Experience

I started out the project by asking fourth and fifth grade students what types of things in our community, including our school community we could improve through art projects. I worked with three classes of fifth graders and two classes of fourth graders for thirty minutes; each day I worked with a different class during the same time slot. It was emphasized that learning would need to take place between the students themselves and the community and vice versa. Places were quickly identified and narrowed down to the school community since we would not need any extra transportation. Students quickly came up with the idea of renovating the school’s outdoor classroom in order to beautify the area and provide a place where students can learn about their environment can perform research, hands on activities, as well as make observations. It was also suggested by students that it would make a great place for art students to paint from real life.

After the location of the project was decided, I broke students into groups, and went over proper group and teamwork behaviors. I gave them a sheet from listing good leadership qualities and disagreement problem solving strategies taken from the book *Service-Learning Companion*

by Duncan and Kopperud (p.40). I then gave each group a worksheet to share, and took students out to the outdoor classroom. Student groups created lists of things that could be improved in the space and what projects we might do. On the Plexiglas breezeway walls I taped large sheets of paper corresponding to the worksheet questions. When the groups finished their worksheets, they wrote their answers to the questions on the large sheets of paper so that everyone could see them. Each class added things to the list and was then broken down into a final plan.

Students addressed the poor landscaping, benches that were splintered and falling apart, barren spots, and plain, boring brick walls. They proposed beginning with creating paintings on the brick walls of animal habitats found in Georgia. This was based on the idea that students would need to know this information for the CRCT. Students identified the different habitats that would be included in the paintings such as, forests, plains, and mountains, oceans, lakes and rivers, and swamps and marshes. A few students expressed interest in learning about the history of the school and including it in the mix. This was voted upon by each class and was found to be important to them and worthy of painting. According to Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr, “History, heritage and traditions do not exist only in the past. These concepts are continually being constructed and reconstructed in the present to make them meaningful and relevant for people’s lives” (p.7). The history of Riverbend came to be one of the most remembered projects, even by the younger students who saw only glimpses of the paintings as they were stored in the art room. During free draw activities students would ask all kinds of questions about the history of the school, often times taking a paper and pencil over to the painting and replicating it on their paper.

Next, students were broken back into their groups and assigned a topic to research. Students checked out the books they felt would be beneficial to the research of their topic while

students who were assigned “The History of Riverbend School” went through old school records and viewed the only photo of the old Riverbend School available. The school history topic was coming up short of anything interesting, so I went to the Hall County Public Library and conducted further research that was not available at our school. One news article was found about the seventy eight year old school on microfilm, so I was able to retrieve copies of it to give to the students.

Once the groups had a few facts written down, they were asked to draw a sketch of their mural idea as a team; depicting everything they could to help educate others about that habitat. From the start, students worked well together despite the occasional argument. Many teams acted as role models for one another. A folder was provided for each group to store their work and notes in. This folder was also shared by each class group that shared their topic of research, for example, one group of students researching oceans, would also be able to see the work of four other groups from the remaining classes who also researched oceans. The information was meant to be shared and improved upon as they went. After four class periods of research and sketching, students were given a large paper and were asked to draw out their final sketch for their mural which would then be voted on by the entire school. Voting on the drawings took place the following week, allowing all students the chance to vote for their favorite drawing in each mural category. After the votes were counted, winners were announced on the school’s morning announcement television show. The winners were from three classes of fifth graders and one class of fourth graders, which did not surprise me since the dedication of these classes to the project was so high. Problems with teamwork and interest in one of the fourth grade classes were a nonstop aggravation. Their homeroom teacher, core subject teachers, and special areas teachers were unable to gain control or interest in any form from the students. I think the dynamic of the

class was damaged earlier in the year due to this class having so many students, nearly 30, and adding to that stress they have had three different homeroom teachers throughout the year.

At this point, the principal informed us that we would not be allowed to paint directly on the walls of the outdoor classroom. She explained that it was a county policy and suggested we find a way to make the murals removable. I then explained the circumstances to the students and asked for ideas to solve our problem. I emphasized to the students that plans are sometimes derailed and it is up to us to figure out a way to get the train back on the tracks. Students quickly came up with the idea of creating paintings on large boards or extra large canvases. We weighed the pros and cons of each of these while at night I asked my Ohio State classmates what they had experience with. The students and I decided that large canvases would work the best for our project. My dad and I built the frames from scratch and stapled the canvas to the frames which were 4'x4'. Students then primed the canvases with white exterior latex paint to prevent water damage and mold growth.

When the canvases were dry, students traced the winning mural drawings onto the canvas using overhead projectors. Then they began painting the scenes gradually with acrylic paint because of its plasticity, class by class, so it only took a few weeks to complete. I chose the most well behaved, patient class, which were fifth graders, to come in and help the fourth graders paint the murals. When they were finished, I let the same class of fifth graders go back in and paint the details of the murals. It was actually very exciting for the students of that class since they are typically seen by their teachers as the behavior problem class as well as having many low income, below average learners. I saw a change in their class that really touched my heart and the pride on their faces nearly brought me to tears.

The murals were hung outside on the brick walls for everyone to see and were coated in a thin layer of polyurethane spray for added protection against the elements. Fourth and fifth graders were asked to reflect on their experience during the project, and then once again after it was completed. In her journal, Kindle wrote, “It is great getting to do a project that is fun and challenging. It’s great to do something different because we don’t get to do this kind of thing in any other class. The old art teacher never wanted to know what we thought or how we felt, we are really lucky.” Anita wrote, “If we all work together we can accomplish something hard. We all have different minds and we all think of different things.” There were many great things my students wrote in their journals about their experiences during the project, but these stood out to me the most. During their final reflections, many students said that they learned how to work together, even with people they did not get along with and expressed appreciation for their talents. For example, Mattie said, “I learned how to work with people I don’t get along with and how to express my feelings to show my creative side to see what art really is.” This to me, confirms the success of the overall project and the effect it had on my students.

The Experience Continues

For the second part of this project, I added my four, third grade classes who were previously working with the big idea of home during regular art projects. Students had recently finished drawing and reflecting on their dream homes, which I felt would help them to imagine and build upon something we were already exploring. I took students out into the outdoor classroom and asked students if the space could be considered a home. At first many students rejected that idea, but the more they thought about it, the more homes they could find for small animals and insects. Students recalled that outside areas where certain animals and insects live are called habitats. We discussed what animals and insects might live in our outdoor classroom.

Some students were able to come up with animals they had already seen in the outdoor classroom, but pointed out that there were few to speak of. I took students back to my room where we watched a short video about habitats. I asked students whether or not our outdoor classroom had all of the things a place needs to be called a habitat, reminding them of the things that they also need at home in order to survive. “Homes and habitats need to have shelter, food, water, and sometimes sunshine for things to live and grow” Trey reminded his class. Ideas then came swarming in for bird houses and bird feeders since the students had pointed out that there are very few birds in our outdoor classroom. It was decided that squirrels lived in trees and ate nuts, which there were already plenty of.

I assigned two classes to be in charge of designing bird feeders and two classes to be in charge of designing bird houses. Two students from two different classes, one of which was not assigned bird houses, volunteered to make bird houses at home with their father and grandfather for the class to decorate. Since one of those classes was assigned bird feeders originally, they worked on their feeders until their volunteer brought in five wooden birdhouses. The other class ended up waiting for two weeks to work on their birdhouses, which meant I had to come up with something else for them to do. For that particular class, I broke them down into groups and asked them to come up with a design theme for their birdhouse. Then students chose a side of the bird house that they wanted to paint on and created sketches for their birdhouse designs to show the members of their group. Upon their next visit, since there were still no bird houses in sight, I asked them to write creatively about what life would be like as a bird living in the outdoor classroom and to create a picture to support their writing. Students were eager to share their stories and asked to share them with the class at the front of the room.

Meanwhile, other classes were working on birdfeeders and birdhouses made from 2 liter soda bottles. Students suggested using found materials for their birdhouses so they could also help the environment by recycling. I had lots of soda bottles, plastic cups of all shapes and sizes, plastic plates, and wooden spoons that were donated the previous year. I broke students into groups by tables and stressed the importance of working together as a team as well as solving problems without arguing. Each group received a sketch of a soda bottle as a template to put together their ideas for the design. Students were instructed to color their designs and gather the materials they would need to complete their house or feeder. I assisted students with cutting and hot gluing pieces together when needed. After I coated their pieces with a plastic friendly spray paint as a basecoat students were then free to paint their artwork with acrylic paint using their sketch as a guide. When all of the bottles were finished I sprayed them with a clear coat to protect them further and drilled holes in the neck of the bottle to insert wire hangers.

Students took their finished pieces to the outdoor classroom and hung them on hooks and tree branches. They were very proud of their work and gleefully asked if they could do more projects for the outdoor classroom. “Can we work with kindergarteners?” Dalia suggested almost immediately. I asked if anyone had any ideas about how we could work with kindergarteners and improve the outdoor classroom at the same time which resulted in an out pouring of ideas all at once. They decided it would be fun to help kindergarteners plant a flower bed. After approving this idea with the other third grade classes I arranged several days when kindergarteners could meet with third graders in the outdoor classroom. I felt like the experience needed to be a little more personal for the kindergarteners, as well as add a little more color, so I bought cement edging and let each student paint a section of it after we watched a short animated video about how flowers grow. I explained that they would be working with the third graders to plant flowers

in the outdoor classroom and we would use their cement pieces to go around the flowerbed to create a barrier so that no one steps on them and for added decoration. They were really excited about working with the third graders and began asking me as they painted when the third graders were going to get there.

I quizzed the third graders on how plants grow, what they need to survive, and how to plant them correctly so that they could answer any questions the kindergarteners might have for them. They even learned how to read and interpret the information tabs that are found in flats of flowers. The third graders prepared the soil in the spot where we would put the flowerbed. I taught them how to use shovels, hoes, garden rakes, and trowels. After the soil was loosened students added potting soil to the mixture. When the time came to plant flowers, I had a little over thirty students in the outdoor classroom for three days, ready to get to work. I first went over rules and outdoor classroom etiquette before asking students to choose a partner. I was afraid students would single other students out, leaving them with no partners, but the third graders quickly took the kindergarteners under their wing without any hesitation, even if there were an odd number of students.

I asked the groups to come back to the flower bed to receive a plant and help their new kindergarten friend plant it in the soil and then go back to the benches to sit quietly until everyone had gotten a turn. I asked them to use that time to get to know their new friends. For all of the students I had to manage by myself, it went pretty smooth because it was new and exciting to them and they were intent on listening. The third graders also did a wonderful job redirecting the kindergarteners to use good behavior, as well as the kindergarteners who had rambunctious third graders as partners did the same.

As I stated earlier, my principal insisted that I include every grade level in the renovation of the outdoor classroom so I came up with a quick plan to add the first and second grade students. I did not feel prepared to create a meaningful lesson for those students, nor did I feel they would get to have the same involvement as the other groups, but it was made clear that it was a requirement I would have to fulfill. I decided to have students create mosaic stepping stones. I wanted to attempt to make the lesson as meaningful as I could so I made the lesson about Italy. In the lesson I show students a PowerPoint about Italy, its history, art and architecture including mosaics. During the next lesson I placed pie plates full of cement, colored glass pieces, pencils, and scratch paper on each table. Students were instructed to create a simple, easy design as a team to put into the concrete with the glass pieces. After the cement had dried, I found that there was a big problem with the glass not sticking to the concrete, so I had to get a second grade class to help put the pieces back, this time into grout. I am not as proud of this part of the service learning project as the others since it was not well planned and the students did not seem to connect to the project as well.

Observations and Reflections

I learned that service learning projects can quickly overwhelming even if you think you have planned very well for everything. In the future I think I will advertise projects like this more throughout the school because at times, some of the students had a hard time understanding or have just forgotten that the whole school is counting on them to create a “teachable” and welcoming space. During the fourth and fifth grade portion of the project I had take a break in service learning lessons in order to get art show artwork finished before March since fourth and fifth grade students usually take the longest to get their work done. I also want to get that out of the way so that we can get back to focusing on the service learning project.

Based on the behavior and maturity level of our fourth and fifth graders, I may choose a younger group next time or spend more time working on building good relationships between the students. Some of the main problems I had with the fourth and I think for the rest of the project I will consider involving more of the lower grades. I will also look at more structuring for the fourth and fifth graders so that they can have fun without disturbing everyone and staying on task. I began using video cameras as a way for the fourth and fifth graders to communicate between one another, but this ended up taking too much time since students either goofed around, or would not talk. The students really like using the cameras to introduce themselves and have requested to do more with the cameras, but I think they need a lot more guidance and practice with the camera operation and use. I think filming should be done one group at a time to minimize noise. Students also tend to take thirty minutes to answer one question if they do not like one little thing on the video. I have yet to figure out something that will actually work with that problem.

Conclusions

The overall project seemed to be very effective at least to create teamwork amongst my students and develop a hunger for helping their community, which is what I wanted to instill in them. Christopher Olubunmi Adejumo (2010) defines service learning in art education as:

providing learners with profound understanding of art concepts, development of their intrapersonal thought process, and increased knowledge of their community and its needs...connects knowledge acquired through formal instruction with experiences gathered informally during community service....becomes more meaningful on a personal level...enhances their self-esteem, pride in their community and enthusiasm in participating in future community development projects. (p.24)

I have seen all of these things happen in my students and I could not be prouder of what we have done. This is certainly a jumping off point for more service learning projects with my students in the future. Dr. Hutzel's Multicultural Art Education course has opened my eyes in so many different ways. I learned that my students endure more than I could ever imagine and it helped me understand racial issues I never understood before. This course has definitely changed my life and the way I teach my students.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This program has really changed my life both on a personal level and as an art educator. It was truly refreshing to be involved in a program that is specifically tailored to art education. I first began my masters at the college I received my bachelors degree. It was more of the same old stuff that had little to do with art education. I spent a lot of my time learning about CRCT testing and little about teaching art. While in the only art education specific class offered for my degree, which was a class of two people including myself, we were required to buy the book *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking* by Sydney Walker. I began reading the assigned chapters and quickly fell in love with the book. It was like the book was written specifically for me, I understood everything clearly and I was astounded that I actually liked reading a textbook! In the book Dr. Walker described lessons that I could relate to in my teaching practice and I couldn't wait to try them. Out of curiosity, I flipped to the back of the book to find out more about the author, when I saw that she taught at Ohio State University I immediately got on to my computer to look up the art education department. Low and behold I found out about a Mostly Online Masters Program dedicated to Art Education. I immediately applied and now here I am! I was surprised with how laid back the course flow of the online program was, I felt like we were not judged on our responses to questions, nor bullied into thinking how the professors wanted us to think, it was the most genuine learning I have ever received from a college course. The learning was student driven with the professors acting as facilitators, supporting and striving to let us make our own decisions as we learned. The time I spent at Ohio State University was the most valuable education I have ever received.

There are many key changes in my understanding about art teaching. I quickly learned that there is more substance to teaching art other than techniques. The art program at the school that I received my undergraduate degree was not up to date in any art education research; it was only when I went back for my masters that anyone had begin to teach us about the history and practices of art education today. If it were not for those first classes at my undergraduate school, I would not have found out about the Mostly Online Masters classes. For the first time, I learned about Contemporary artists and actually liked it. I then learned how to incorporate contemporary art and artists into my teaching practices as well as facilitating insightful discussions about art with my students. Big ideas provided the guidance and meaning that my students were looking for in my lessons, but rarely received before I enrolled at Ohio State. The changes in my teaching practices were positively reflected in the excitement of my students and the deeper thinking that occurred during my new lessons. I had often been curious about assessment and had many unanswered questions remaining from my undergraduate studies that were answered during the Ohio State courses.

In the future I am planning to pursue EVERYTHING! I will be taking Dr. Parsons' advice from our Assessment class this past summer, "Take it slow, try it a little at a time, and you don't need to overwhelm yourself." As I begin to perfect my lessons and grow my curriculum over the years, I will gradually implement more assessments, work with more big ideas as well as more in depth, have students reflect on their work more often, help their community through art, and learn to communicate their ideas to others. During the next school year I plan on continuing our outdoor classroom service learning project to include more opportunities for students to work together on art to help their environment. I want to start more service learning activities that reach farther out into our community and even globally. I also

plan to link my big ideas to the service learning activities to provide deeper thinking and meaning. I will begin working with more assessments and getting my students accustomed to thinking more about their work throughout the process rather than just the finished product. I believe my assessment practices will really begin to fall in place as I perfect my lessons over the years.

I have learned how much reading the latest research in art education helps me grow as a teacher as well as the importance of conducting and publishing my own research. Although I cannot say that I am fond of writing papers, but I think what I have learned from Dr. Hutzel's class has really given me a strong foundation for conducting and writing about my research. In the future, maybe even as early as this next school year I will host a professional learning day for the elementary art teachers in my school system. With what I have learned throughout my courses at Ohio State, I feel confident in passing along my experiences in order to help my fellow teachers improve their curriculum for their students. I have never been really confident in the way that I teach my students, but now I feel like I can teach them confidently and know that they are learning something valuable that will shape their futures regardless of their stations in life.

I have also changed as an artist as a result of this program. Through Dr. Richardson's class I applied big ideas to my own artwork. By examining the process of my artmaking practices I was able to look at my ideas in different ways. I found that I can find time to actually be an artist while being a teacher and that inspiration is all around me. This experience has made it easier for me to see how my students would think through the artmaking process using big ideas. Now I know where problems may arise when planning lessons and how to answer my students' questions.

The only question I still have about teaching art is something that cannot be answered easily. I often wonder when art education will become what is considered an important subject area by our nations' schools. I think with the new changes taking place within our curriculum, such as linking community and art, as well as creating meaning that provokes thoughtful inquiry into global issues through the artistic process. I just hope that the future of art education is a bright one and can be valued as it should be. As I continue teaching, I know that I will continue to ask questions and seek out the answers. For now, I feel prepared to tackle the questions that will arise in the future because of my time at The Ohio State University. If not for the Mostly Online Masters Program at Ohio State University I would not be the teacher that I am today and I cannot wait to continue to change the face of art education for years to come.

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